

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_218646

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

"In Prison For Liberty" Series.

From Ministry To Prison

BY

VIJAYLAXMI PUNDIT

***(Hon'ble Minister for Local Self-Government and Public
Health, United Provinces Government)***

New Literature

ALLAHABAD.

1946

**Printed and published by K. P. Khattri at the Allahabad Block
Works Ltd., Zero Road Allahabad for and on behalf of
New Literature, 257 Chak, Allahabad.**

12th August 1942

I woke up with a start and switched on the light. Binda was standing at the foot of my bed. He told me the police had arrived and wished to see me. It was 2 a.m. My mind was a confused jumble of the events of the preceding twenty-four hours. The shots fired on the students' procession were still ringing in my ears and before my eyes I could only see the faces of those young men whom I had helped to pick up and remove to hospital. I was utterly weary in mind and body and more than a little dazed.

The girls were asleep on the veranda and I did not wish to disturb them. Both Lekha and Tara had gone to bed exhausted after what they had been through the day before. They had seen sights which would not easily be effaced from their memory and were bewildered and unhappy.

I went out to the porch. The City Magistrate the Deputy Superintendent of Police, and half a dozen armed policemen were standing waiting for me in the darkness. I switched on the light and was amazed to find the grounds full of plain-clothes men some of whom had actually come up on to the

veranda. This annoyed me and very curtly I ordered them off into the garden before speaking to the City Magistrate. He was ill at ease and said he had a warrant for my arrest. "Why is it necessary for so many armed men to come to arrest one unarmed woman at this amazing hour?" I asked. A search was also to take place, I was informed I told them to go ahead with the search while I got ready for prison.

I had not expected to be arrested and was taken by surprise. There was no one with the girls, no possibility of making satisfactory arrangements. Indira had arrived from Bombay a few hours earlier. She was tired so I ran upstairs to say good-bye to her. After a kiss and a few hurried instructions to Indira I woke the girls and broke the news. They were brave as always and immediately grasped the situation—no useless questions, no fuss. All three of them helped me to pack and Lekha hurriedly put together a few books for me to take along. Rita looked at me with big eyes heavy with sleep. Looking at her my courage began to ebb. She was so little and the world was so big—who would take care of her? As if sensing my thoughts she smiled at me. "How wonder-

ful to live in these days Mummie," she said, "I wish I could go to jail too." I felt suddenly that there was no need to worry and with a lighter heart I bent down to kiss her. "Let's say good-bye to you outside Mummie," Tara said, "I want the police to see how we take these partings." They came out with me and in the porch we said good-bye. "Darling don't worry. Everything will be fine. I will look after the kids," said Lekha, giving me a quick tight hug. "Bye-bye Mummie darling," said Tara, "we shall keep the flag flying." Her eyes were bright and she held her head high. Rita clung to me for a minute but her voice was firm as she said, "Mummie darling, take care of yourself. We shall be fighting the British outside while you are in."

By this time some of the servants had arrived and I was able to say good bye to them. They were not as brave as the children and some of them had tears in their eyes. I walked down the drive to the gate and was surprised to find it locked as was usual at that hour. How had the police come in? Evidently by the side wicket. We went out the same way.

Three or more police lorries were lined

up on the road outside. In the darkness I could not make out the exact number. More armed men appeared out of the shadows. I was asked to get into the first lorry. The D. S. P. took the wheel. The City Magistrate and some others got in behind and we started.

The city had been in the hands of the military for several hours—martial law in everything but name and a curfew order in force. We drove in an atmosphere of extreme tension. As we travelled along the familiar road to Naini my mind was full of many thoughts and before my eyes like some film in a cinema were pictures of other journeys—dozens of them from 1921 onwards. We reached the Jumna Bridge, heavily guarded and were challenged by the sentries on duty. Even after the words "Friend" and "Police Car" were shouted, the vigilant sentry was doubtful about letting us proceed—what terrific loyalty the British inspire in those who serve them!

Arriving at Naini I was informed that the jail authorities had not been intimated of my approaching arrival. Orders had, apparently, been communicated late at night to the police and the jail staff did not expect me.

After half an hour's wait, the door of the Female Prison was opened and the matron in the manner of all jail matrons, came rushing along panting and puffing and very much out of breath.

I was conducted to the old familiar barrack. It was 3-45 a.m. I spread my bedding on the ground, was locked in, and a new term of prison-life began. My head ached badly and the throbbing in my temple prevented sleep. I lay thinking over the events of the past two days. I was worried about Lekha and felt she would land up in prison. The previous evening as she was going to bed I talked with her and tried to get her reactions to events. She spoke with great bitterness. "It will take a long time for me to forget what I have seen Mummie, and it will be longer before I can root out the hatred which is growing in my heart. We can't think in terms of normal life any more—there's no going back for us. We must go on straight to the end, whatever the end may be." Of course she is right—we must go on—to the end. At last I fell asleep.

13th August 1942

My first thought on waking was of the girls. My head continued to ache and I lay

in bed until the *lambardarni* announced that she wished to sweep the barrack.

There are few of the old familiar faces left and the new ones look at me like something out of a museum. There is no water, no sanitary arrangements—in fact nothing at all. I walked in the yard for half an hour, then I got a little water from the convicts' bathing tap and washed my face. About seven the matron came and said she would send me some tea from her house as the jail was unable to supply rations until 10 a.m. I had no desire to accept the matron's tea but my head continued to throb and I thought perhaps the tea would help. It didn't. I spent a miserable day.

Towards noon some raw rations arrived, but still no coal, so cooking was not possible. Later, with the help of one of the convicts, I made a small fire of twigs and made an attempt to cook but it was a failure as the fire would not light. I read and slept and finally got up at 4 p.m. to start this diary. It is now six and lock up takes place in a few moments.

Here comes the matron followed by the usual procession of wardresses to lock up and so ends the first day in my third term of

imprisonment.

After lock up the matron came back again in half an hour and announced that she had orders to leave my barrack open and that I might sleep outside if I wished. I was glad of this concession. Before leaving, she enquired what I was having for dinner and was horrified when I said I had nothing to eat at hand. She wanted to send me something but I refused.

I walked in the yard for a while. It was fairly cool and my head felt much better. As I walked I almost forgot that I had been away from here for nearly a year and half. It seemed as if this was just a continuation of the previous imprisonment. I put my bed outside in the yard and lay down to read—but my mind wandered and I could not follow the book. Every now and again shouts of 'Inquilab Zindabad' and other slogans came to me over the wall. I felt less alone after that, and in a way, happier. The stars were out and I lay looking up at the sky for a while, then went back to my book. At 9-30 I put out the light as hoards of insects were making life impossible by crawling all over me and getting into my hair.

I woke up at eleven to find myself wet and

the rain coming down in torrents. By the time I had brought my bed in, I was soaked and had to change. After the rain it was cool and I had a peaceful night.

14th August 1942

I woke up in the morning feeling fresh and prepared to be civil to the world, but when by 8-30 a.m. there was no coal and no tea I found myself losing my temper. I think hunger had something to do with it also. The matron had not been, so I wrote and informed the Superintendent that since I had been admitted to the jail no food had been supplied to me and if it had not been for the matron's kindness in sending me some tea from her house I should have starved completely. I mentioned that if the jail was short of raw rations I might be given the cooked food served to the convicts. This note brought the matron running and out of breath—full of apologies for the slackness in the arrival of my rations.

Shortly afterwards some raw rations and vegetables arrived and a bundle of firewood. Earlier I had, with the help of one of the convicts, built a *chula* in the portion the veranda which is to serve as a kitchen. I cleaned up

some vegetables and cooked a simple meal. Being really hungry I enjoyed it.

15th August 1942

Food is an overrated subject. One realizes this most forcibly in jail. It is all right if one is in pleasant surroundings with the right people and the food is well cooked and well served. It is certainly possible to enjoy a meal in such a setting. But when one has to cook in the most primitive fashion and the heat is making one ill and the rations are mildewed, it is really a doubtful pleasure. I have decided to give it up and shall try to confine myself to bread and tea.

Prison tea has to be seen to be believed! My experience of tea is fairly varied, ranging from the exquisitely perfumed and delicate varieties that Madam Chiang sends me to the nondescript syrupy stuff one is obliged to swallow during election campaigns—but never have I seen or tasted anything like jail tea. I am convinced it is some special and very deadly variety of leaf grown for the poor unfortunates who are in prison. Not having any tea of my own I took this decoction once and nearly passed out. It would give me a tremendous thrill if I could

make all jail officials live for one week on jail rations. We should not have quite so much talk about the "well-balanced and wholesome diet." I wonder why we are always able to plan well-balanced diets for others, but for ourselves we generally try to get the most tasty, forgetting the balance part entirely.

I am going to read a fascinating book Indu has lent me—an anthology of "The World's Great Letters." I am looking forward to an interesting evening. I like to keep myself occupied at this hour because, above all others it is the hour when I grow reminiscent and a little homesick. I have no idea how long this term of imprisonment is going to last. I had better shake off such weakness and settle down !

16th August 1942

The first thing I learnt this morning was that there had been firing in the city twice yesterday. The information is not from a source I consider reliable, but nevertheless it has disturbed me. It is terrible to be shut up there when others are exposed to daily dangers.

I was interrupted by the matron who

seemed to be in a mood for a chat. Having nothing to say to her I sat silent while she told me the story of her life. There was also a running commentary on the various Superintendents under whom she has served and the Inspector Generals of Prisons she has seen and spoken to. It is amusing to compare notes about jail administration as seen by different matrons. Some day I shall write a book about 'Jails and Matrons I Have Known.' It should make amusing reading. If my term of imprisonment is long enough I should be well acquainted with prison politics—though I seem to have more than a passing knowledge of them already. They are not intricate to any one who tries to understand a little the workings of the human mind.

I spent an hour last night reading "The Letters." Some of them are really beautiful. 'Letters are always interesting—specially if they are other people's,' Voltaire has said. 'The post is the consolation of life,' and some one else has added, 'As long as there are postmen life will have zest.' There must be very few people who have not at some period of their lives recognized the truth of the above sayings. Most of us have waited in

breathless suspense for the post which was to bring the one letter we wanted most—may be it was news of a child far away from us—a friend from whom we have been parted—money on which many things depended—or just a love letter—one of those silly epistles which all lovers write, full of the pleasant nothings which the beloved waits for with so much eagerness and which she imagines are hers alone—forgetting that the same words and sentiments have been shared by all lovers since the beginning of time.

Today the matron has permitted one of the convict girls to come over and help me with my cleaning and cooking etc. Her name is Durgi and she belongs to the potter class. From her history-ticket I see she is twenty-six years old and is serving a sentence for the murder of her husband. She has already done eight years. She is very dark but has good features and pleasing manners. Like all other convicts she wears a pair of tiny drawers and an upper garment which has no special name. The regular jail uniform—skirt and bodice is too heavy and hot for use in the summer and is only worn on inspection days. Durgi has nice limbs

and they are seen to good advantage in her abbreviated costume. I think she and I will be good of friends.

There has been a hard shower of rain today and it is cooler at last. The sky is dark with clouds so there will be more rain tonight. The barrack is leaking so badly that there is no spot where my bed can entirely escape. I have chosen a place where my head is safe but where my feet will get a bath! The insects have increased and it is almost impossible to keep the light on—but I do not intend to be beaten so easily. It is only 7-30 p.m. and I cannot possibly go to bed yet—so I shall seek forgetfulness in my book and read Heloise's beautiful letters to Abelard.

There are as rigid social conventions in prison as outside. The woman who is in for abduction is on the lowest rank of the social ladder, then come the counterfeiters of coins, thieves and finally the women who are serving a sentence for murder. These are the leaders and they are tremendously proud of their position. It is usual when a quarrel takes place for a woman to say—"Don't dare to treat me as if I were a common thief—won't stand for it—

I am in for murder." During my first term of imprisonment in 1932 I was a little afraid of this type in the beginning. But soon one recognised how after all any one of us might commit an act of violence in a moment of anger or through sheer force of temper—it wouldn't necessarily degrade us to the level of the human being who commits daily in cold blood acts such as theft, abduction and the like.

17th August 1942

It has rained in torrents since at last night. My barrack looks like a lake and the bed an island—the only spot where one can have a degree of safety from the elements. Yet somehow the weather has helped me. It is in keeping with my mood and I do not mind it. I think if the sun had been shining today I would have felt more depressed.

The day has dragged on and I have felt no inclination to do anything—I asked Durgi to make me something to eat thinking in my ignorance that it would be a fairly simple thing for her to do. The dish she presented to me looked like dirty porridge and tasted worse.

Charcoal is not supplied as on previous occasions and the smoke from the damp wood makes cooking very difficult. The rations are of the poorest quality and mixed with grit and dirt, tiny stones and even an odd spider or two thrown in for good weight. After cleaning the dal and rice one finds that the quantity has appreciably diminished. I am keeping the dirt I have taken out of my ration until inspection day and will show it to the doctor. The ghee supplied is dark brown in colour and has a funny smell. There is so little of it, it seems useless to bother about the quality.

Lack of news is irritating. Rumours, of course, come in—a jail is a sort of whispering gallery and the whispers have a habit of echoing and re-echoing round the place, one can't help hearing them, but rumours are not enough and one craves for some real authentic news especially at a time like this. I find myself fretting and losing my temper quite unnecessarily.

18th August 1942

Monday and parade day. The usual hustle and bustle since dawn—shouting, abuse, much running about—and finally, the visit of the Superintendent. It was very brief.

thank goodness! I was in no mood for his small talk. He had sent me his cane with a leather flap at the end to use as a fly swat and enquired if it were of any use....."It helps me to relieve my feelings," I told him, "even if I do not succeed in killing many flies!" "Are you satisfied?" he asked. I think what he actually meant was: "Are you comfortable?" "Would I be in jail if I were?" I answered. That ended the visit.

The Superintendent's remark gives me food for thought—satisfaction, comfort, happiness, freedom—how meaningless these words have become. I am inclined to agree with Bernard Shaw when he says: 'Only on paper has humanity yet achieved glory, beauty, truth, knowledge, virtue and abiding love.' But that is cynical and it is not right for people like us, engaged in the struggle for freedom, to adopt such a philosophy even in our moments of depression I must guard against it.

I had just finished the last sentence when a noise at the gate announced another visitor. This time it was the Commissioner who had come. He came straight to my barrack and with a clearing of the throat enquired if I were comfortable. There seemed no point

in giving the obvious reply and I don't think he expected one, so I said nothing but just smiled. He looked hurriedly round the barrack and made an orderly retreat.

Today is my birthday and the children sent me a parcel of books—but the pleasure of the gift was short-lived. The Superintendent told me that a new set of regulations had been received and would apply to us. We are to be called 'two' prisoners and shall be placed in the second class.....We shall not be permitted newspapers, letters or interviews or any article from home. Jail clothes will be provided—lock up will take place. Our allowance will be reduced from -/12/- to -/9/- per day.

None of these things moved me except the restriction on correspondence. "How will your children manage without you?" the Superintendent asked me. I said, "They know how to look after themselves." He was rather surprised at my answer but agreed and said, "Yes, they are exceedingly plucky youngsters....."

The sad news that Mahadev Desai had died of heart failure in jail on the 15th has come as a great shock and has deeply hurt me. My mind is full of pictures of him. He

was a fine person—one of god's good men. We are the poorer for his loss. I wonder where poor Durga and the boy are. Now that Bapu is in prison they have no home. I wish I could send a word of comfort to Durga. Ever since I heard of Mahadevbhai's death I have been terribly upset. Last night I lay awake and so many incidents connected with him passed through my mind. It seems only the other day that he came to me in Anand Bhawan and asked me to read an article in the *Modern Review* written by a 'dear friend' of his—a young man whom he described as 'most brilliant and very lovable.' The year was 1920, the article was entitled 'At the feet of the Guru' and the name of the author was Ranjit Pandit. For 22 years now I have been the wife of this 'most brilliant and very lovable' man. Ranjit and Mahadev were at college together and graduated in the same year. Although they seldom corresponded, there was a deep bond of sympathy and affection between them. The news of Mahadev's passing will hurt Ranjit.

20th August 1942

This Morning I woke up early before unlocking and lay looking up at our roof. The barrack is even more dilapidated than

before. The ceiling falls in chunks every day and makes a mess all over my bed and on the floor. The tiles are badly placed and sun and rain come in as they please. These days the glare gets very strong and I have to keep on my sun glasses most of the day. The floor is so uneven that one cannot walk across the barrack at night without stumbling. The bats and frogs are frequent visitors and I live in terror of them.

I am writing this after midnight as it seems to be the only quiet period. Today was specially noisy but the night is calm and peaceful in spite of the counting of the prisoners which we can hear at intervals all night.

I sit at my grating and watch the stars twinkle. They give one a feeling of security. They are always the same, serene and undisturbed and the follies of men do not worry them. Sometimes a moonbeam also steals in and lies across the floor like a silver stream. Occasionally I hear planes fly overhead—the sound makes me feel restless. I want to break through my bars and fly. It is absurd to keep human beings locked up in this fashion—it solves no problem and creates new difficulties. The world moves in a

circle and we always come back to the starting point. Progress is only a word; what does it mean I wonder !

There has been a terrific commotion again today. One of the convicts was due to have an interview with a relative. The poor man had come a very long distance and spent money that he could ill afford. On arrival a wardress told him he could not have an interview unless she was paid. This is the usual thing and as a rule relatives of prisoners are aware of it. The man first begged to be excused as he was poor but finally produced two rupees which were pocketed. When the woman was taken out the wardress found some petty fault and started a quarrel with her and she was ordered back to her cell and the interview cancelled. Of course we all knew the reason. The poor woman howled all day and her friends hurled abuse at the jail authorities.

The amount of bribery that goes on is shocking. It is done in all sorts of ways, sometimes quite openly. Says Geffray Mynshul: 'A prison is a grave to bury men alive, a place wherein a man for half a year's imprisonment may learn more law than he can at Westminster for a hundred pounds.

It is a microcosmes, a little world of woe, it is a map of misery, it is a place that will learn a young man more villainy if he be apt to take it in one half year, than he can learn at twenty bowling allies, brothel houses or ordinaries; and an old man more policy than if he had been a pupil to Machiavelli. It is a place that hath more diseases predominant in it than the pest house in plague time and it stinks more than the Lord Mayor's dog-house in August.'

22nd August 1942

This Afternoon at 2 o'clock it suddenly began to rain in torrents—in a few minutes the barrack had begun to leak and the next half-hour was spent in dragging the bed about to a place of safety. The rain beat through the bars and fell in great big drops from the roof. Eventually I lay down and let the foot of the bed get wet, curling up my feet to protect them. The rain stopped as suddenly as it began and now the sky is clear and blue and the atmosphere very muggy.

All my clothes and the few articles of food are getting mildewed. Everything smells horribly including the clothes I am wearing. I wonder what it will be like when the jail

clothes are provided. It is just as well that we are used to wearing Khadi!

I am worried about my books. The new rule by which books and periodicals come through the District Magistrate means that half the books will never reach us and those that do get here will take many weeks to accomplish the journey. I have a perfect horror of being left without anything to read. The days are so incredibly long and the prison nights surely contain more hours than any others. Time lengthens out, "each day a month, each month a year" until one has lived through a century. The Superintendent asked me on my birthday how old I was. "I do not know," I said, "I feel as if I had lived through centuries." Later I was reminded of a quotation: "No hour glass, no diary can estimate for you the fullness of time; it is the soul that fills it; if the soul lie asleep, it is not filled at all; if it be awake, in the vigils of suspense, of sorrow, of aspiration, there may be more in an hour than you can find in a dozen empty lives. It is not larger time that we want, so much as the more capacious soul to flow through every pore of the little which we have." I suppose it is "the more capacious soul" that

is at the present moment, making me feel as if I had lived through centuries!

There have been more than the usual quarrels today and even now when lockup has taken place there is no peace. The beauty of the night is being made hideous with harsh sounds. In the evenings I like to sit near my grating and watch the drifting clouds pass in the sky and wait for the stars to come out. It is fascinating to watch them twinkle. So far there has been no moon but I am looking forward to her visits later on. She is not a lady to be relied on, being a coquette, she is full of moods. Jails do not please her, but sometimes I watch her playing hide and seek with the clouds and she sends a silver beam into the barrack by way of greeting and to show that she still remembers me.

23rd August 1942

I couldn't sleep again last night and was tired when I got up this morning. To make matters worse I had various aches and pains and a fit of depression all at the same time. I was idle the whole morning not being in the mood to read or write or do anything else. Owing to the rain I couldn't go into the yard and kept walking inside for over

an hour feeling caged and restless. Finally I lay down. In the afternoon matron came in with four books sent by a friend. "Oh the little more, how much it is!" My depression vanished in a moment. Someone had thought of me and this little contact with the outside world made things more easy. The books look interesting and I am no longer afraid of the evening.

27th August 1942

'Give me the strength to raise my mind above daily trifles.'

Another day, but so like the last and all the ones that have gone before that it might be the same. One feels numb as if the power to feel or think had gone. 'My head aches and a drowsy numbness fills my brain.

Zainab brought some gay-coloured *Rakhis* for the matron today. She was born a Hindu but when quite young was abducted from her husband's home, converted to Islam and married. She has stuck to this man all these years and works in order to keep him in comfort. She observes the Hindu festivals, and even bathes in the Ganges. She is polite and quarrels less than the rest and is generally good-humoured and placid. In fact her placidity has made her spread and

spread until she looks in the distance, like a large ball made out of odd bits of bright coloured rags and her walk is the satisfied waddle of an old duck.

Our imprisonment is a constant source of worry to her and she offers up frequent prayers for the welfare of my family. My meals are another of her worries—she tries to persuade me to eat what she calls 'proper food.' It distresses her to see anyone eat bread and butter and drink so much tea. When I draw her attention to her own large proportions and say I have no desire to spread like her, she raises her eyes to Heaven and says, "That has nothing to do with food—it is Kismet." At present she is disturbed at the thought of a possible Japanese invasion as she feels she will not be able to run away, owing to her bulk and she has heard the Japs are cannibals ! Horrible thought !

28th August 1942

Another very hot, stifling day—the barrack is full of flies, gnats, ants and all manner of insects. The perspiration flows off our faces and bodies and keeps us in a sort of miniature Turkish bath. There is thunder in the air but no rain so far.

Lekha sent some copies of *Life* and *Time*

the other day. They have helped me to pass several dull hours and the advertisements are a source of constant interest. They make me think of Ritu !

I have had no news of Ranjit since he left for Bombay three weeks ago and am beginning to worry about him. I wish I could communicate with him to tell him to be careful about his health. Not knowing Bhai's whereabouts is also worrying me. I hope he is well and does not want for anything.

The heat makes it impossible to do anything except lie on one's bed and gasp. From where I lie I look through my grating to the gate in the yard and weave a chain of stories round the small iron door in the gate 'The Tragedy of The Closed Door' would sound well.

The matron is going out again this evening and comes in all dressed up in a pale pink creation, which, she tells me, she had made especially for the farewell party given to the last Superintendent ! Why do all matrons dye their hair ? That is a problem that has been worrying me for a long time ! I think one of these days I shall let myself go and dye my own hair a bright red. It will be a form of release !

4th September 1942

The ways of Providence and prison officials are inscrutable. We are allowed nine annas a day for our food—for the first week I was here, before these new rules came into force, the allowance was twelve annas. My daily rations never exceeded seven annas. I asked if the balance could be kept to my credit and fruit supplied to me once a week. "Oh yes," said the jail and I thought "how very obliging!" Little did I know! The fruit came the first week, such as it was, and since then eternal chits and messages, all to no effect. The money due to us accumulates and the fruit does not arrive and thus we learn a valuable lesson in patience.

I seem to have been on the war-path ever since I came here. I have not worried the prison authorities so much on former occasions—but this time things are intolerable. If I order fruit, it takes from ten to twelve days to arrive and finally six bananas, well squashed, are handed to me. Naturally I return them immediately. Next morning a chit from the office: "Who is to pay for the bananas?" "Of course the jail," I reply. More chits from the office, more requests for fruit from me—meanwhile the balance of

my daily nine annas is accumulating. When I point out that no fruit has arrived and nearly two rupees are due to me, I am told the contractor cannot find any fruit in the market!

In sheer despair I write to the Superintendent and say that if the contractor is a dishonest rogue there is no earthly reason why I should be his victim. If my fruit does not come I shall make a formal complaint to a higher authority. Result, a flutter in the jail dovecotes and two lovely Kashmir apples. The price too is lovely! Actually I don't care if I have fruit or not, or in fact, anything at all—but there is no reason why the jail should benefit because I happen to eat less than my daily allowances.

5th September 1942

I got up in a terrific temper this morning. It rained all last evening in torrents and most of the night. The barrack is full of water and there is hardly enough room to sit down in a dry spot. During the night, part of my bed got wet through and Lekha was soaked. It is dark and dismal and everything jars on the nerves. The wood is so wet that we cannot light a fire—there is no milk although it is 9 o'clock. I suppose

there will be no rations either until it clears up. If one rainy day can upset the organisation of a Central Prison in this way, I shudder to think what would happen in the event of an enemy invasion! It is easy to imagine what must have happened in Burma when the convicts and lunatics were hurriedly released from their respective prisons.

Purnima is making desperate efforts to light a stove some coal saved from the kitchen. She and Bhagawandei—the *lumbardarni*—are fanning for all they are worth, but so far the only result is the smoke which is filling up the barrack. No sign of a fire yet.

The milk arrived at 9-20 a. m. ! Still no rations. Eventually things began to turn up in bits and had all arrived by afternoon. There has been a great deal of excitement because the matron has the week-end off.

6th September 1942

We had a heavy downpour all night long but it stopped towards morning and is now clearing up. The milk is always delayed now and comes between nine and ten and we cool our heels until it arrives, the rations come at about 10-30, the vegetables at eleven—the bread about four, and if we are lucky, the evening ration of milk comes along just as we

are being locked up,

Everything is so delightfully vague in jail—nobody is responsible for anything—the right way of doing things is always abandoned in favour of the wrong one and so we go on from day to day.

The rations supplied to us get daily worse. Some articles are so bad that we cannot use them at all. Potatoes are not supplied because the market price is high and the overhead charges of the contractor higher and our allowance is not sufficient to pay for them. There are plenty of vegetables in the jail garden but ours are supplied from the bazar. The jail produce goes first to the high officials, and then filters down gradually to the various underlings, who in turn, share it with their own hangers on. Naturally, there is none left for the political prisoners.

The cooked food that comes for the convicts is horrible both in appearance and taste. I have often eaten the cooked jail ration, on former occasions and though there has always been much room for improvement, they have never been of such poor quality as the food now supplied. The dhal is just dirty water with a handful of red chillies floating

on top. The vegetable is always the same and is, I should imagine, cooked without first being washed. One cannot afford to look into it too closely for fear of what may be found inside. The quantity is very small. *Rotis* are also full of grit.

The food is cooked in the men's section of the prison and sent to our side in large buckets—several portions are removed daily during transit. The result is, some women get less than their share and there is a terrific row every few days.

I am in disgrace with the authorities. Some time ago I asked if I could be given coffee instead of tea in my ration. I was informed that there was no mention of coffee in the jail manual, only tea was mentioned. Government sanction was necessary for this and the Superintendent said he would find out if it could be obtained. After three weeks I was told that I could buy a tin of coffee provided I gave up my tea ration—I ordered half a pound and was charged 1/4/- by the jail contractor for what costs -/14/- in the market. The daily allowance is -/9/- so I had to pay two days allowance plus 2 annas more—and as this amount of coffee will only last me a fortnight I shall have to go without

rations for two days every fortnight. My health will no doubt improve by a few fasts. In any case, I prefer the coffee to the food, so actually I stand to gain. It is only the absurdity of the jail methods which proves so annoying at times.

15th September 1942.

I have been reading Laurence Housman's autobiography—'The Unexpected Years.' In describing his school days he says: "Defenders of the public school system—as it existed in my days, and as they would like it to continue—maintain that the bullying of small boys is good for them and has a healthy and hardening effect on their characters. It may be so, but what of its effects on those who do the bullying? It seemed to me a cowardly and despicable thing for the strong to afflict the weak; and I am inclined to think that the divine right of Imperialism to swagger through the world exploiting subject races for their supposed benefit has very largely had its origin in the bullying and fagging which have been countenanced in our public schools."

And, in another place he says: "My school experience taught me early the truth of that wise Greek saying, inscribed in the

Temple at Delphi: 'Would you know a man, give him power.' Wherever I have seen power in operation—the kind of power which its admirers are fond of describing as benevolent despotism' its effect has always been to show very plainly the true character of the man—the good and the bad of him; and very seldom indeed have I found human nature capable of sustaining the burden without moral and intellectual deterioration both in the operator and those on whom he operated. The atavism of cruelty is far too deeply ingrained in the human race for even saints to be entrusted with uncontrolled power over the lives of others....."

This requires no comment !

19th September 1942

Ranjit was arrested at 6 o'clock this morning at Anand Bhawan. He returned from Bombay the night before last. Poor Tara and Rita! I was hoping they would have at least a week with their father. But these days man proposes and the British Government disposes.

4th October 1942

Yesterday the doctor informed me that Indira, Lekha and I had been placed in 'A' class and that in future we would be entitled

to ~~12/-~~ per day ration money. Ranjit and Dr. Katju had also been so classified. We had no further information so we could not tell on what grounds this classification had been made and what other privileges it implied. In any case, I felt this was wrong and until I knew further details I could not possibly accept the additional money. I have accordingly written to the Superintendent. May be, I shall get some information tomorrow at "Parade"

5th October 1942

Great excitement last night. I was roused about 2 a. m. with a start by Zohra shouting through my grating that there was a snake near the Control Watch and she couldn't get past it. At first I was disinclined to leave my bed, but Zohra's excitement communicated itself to me and made me get up.

I flashed on my torch and saw one of those grey, thin, poisonous snakes; this one was about a yard in length and was lying against the wall outside the barrack almost opposite to my bed. We suggested informing the sentry on duty so that he might come in and kill the snake, but in spite of the efforts of both the wardresses he refused to inform the matron or take any action. The snake

remained in the same position from 3 to 3-45 a. m. but the wardresses were far too scared to kill it and the sentry did not think it worthwhile. As we were locked in, it was not possible for us to do anything. Finally the snake disappeared from view—I do not know where it went, because the line of vision from my grating is limited. I wonder what would happen if anybody were unfortunately bitten.

By the time the wardresses and the sentry decided to give the alarm, the matron was roused and dressed, the key taken possession of from the main gate and the Female prison opened—the victim would most probably be singing with the Angels. It's a comforting thought.

9th October 1942

Had a good night. Matron tells me Lekha and I have permission to interview Ranjit tomorrow. I am so excited. He had applied for this interview before leaving Bombay. The Government machinery doesn't seem to have a sense of humour ! However, we shall be thankful for the interview.

10th October 1942

Lekha and I interviewed Ranjit. Found him looking bright in spite of the continuation of his foot trouble. It was good to see

him again but how unsatisfying a prison interview is.

16th October 1942

My loss of weight has alarmed me a little. From today I have decided to have some sort of meal at night. I cannot afford milk as I am already using up my ration money (nine annas daily). It has to suffice for several of the wants of the other barrack as well, and goes round with difficulty. Matron tells me that three more people have been raised to the twelve annas status namely—first class—Tandonji, Rai Amarnath and Purnima.

Discussing Lin Yutang's new book last evening, Lekha announced that as a child she had been a Buddhist, but that now, while still retaining her admiration for the precepts of that religion, she had come back to the fold of her ancestors ! My children are certainly not dull !

10 November 1942

BHAIYA DUJ today.

How many anniversaries of this day I have spent apart from Bhai. Being in jail one has so much time for retrospection and the last day or two I have been very vividly reminded of my childhood days and all the later

period from adolescence onwards when Bhai has played such an important part in my life.

Out of the many good things fate gave me at my birth, one of the best was surely my brother. To have known and loved him and been so near to him would have been ample justification for having being born. In a few days it will be his birthday—another birthday spent in prison. So many good years of his life wasted—I feel very rebellious when I think of all he has had to go through.

18th November 1942

I had been eagerly looking forward to seeing Ranjit on the 14th. It was Bhai's birthday and altogether I was in a happy mood. The interview was due at 9 a.m. but owing to the usual slackness of prison officials, Ranjit was only informed at 8-35 and so sent word that he could not come to the office until ten.

About 9.15 a whisper reached me that Rita had come to the jail in the hope of getting a word with me as something serious had occurred at home for which my advice was needed. I expected to get a glimpse of her at the gate and never dreamt that special permission would be required for this.

On reaching the office I asked the Superintendent if I might see her. It was refer-

red by phone to the District Magistrate and curtly turned down.

Meanwhile, my feelings got the better of me. The desire to see Rita and hold her for a moment in my arms overwhelmed me. I hated the thought of the poor child coming all these miles in distress of mind and being told to go right back—I was on the point of breaking down when I walked Ranjit—happy and full of spirits. "Hello old girl! What's wrong—bad news from home?" were his first words. He came and put his arm round me and I collapsed! However, I pulled myself up in a minute and told him, and he flared up—"Do you mean to tell me you actually asked for permission to see Rita? Haven't I told you again and again that we cannot seek favours from these petty gaulieters who are placed in authority over us. You mustn't let your feelings get the better of you. You are much too big a person, my dear girl, to ask favours from anybody. There is no room in this struggle for softness or favours. Pull yourself up." And much more which need not be put down here, although various officials passing in and out of the office heard and, in their hearts, rejoiced.

It is amazing how much goodwill there is

for the cause even in circles where one would least expect to find it. Well, the interview wasn't what it should have been. I was upset and ashamed of my temporary weakness and Ranjit was annoyed though he was very sweet to me.

31st December 1942

I have been getting more and more lazy. We had an interview with Ranjit last Saturday and heard that there was some talk of Lekha's release as the police have nothing incriminating against her. I do not, however, think there is the slightest possibility of this—though I hope the rumour is true for the sake of Tara and Rita. It would mean so much to them to have Lekha at home.

The girls invited Purnima to supper in the Blue Room after lock up. They have been saving rations for days and planning a meal. Unfortunately our tablecloths have become grey with constant washing and our crockery and cutlery are limited to one plate and one fork each. We have a knife between us—nevertheless we managed to turn out an attractive meal and a change from the usual things we eat.

There have been air raids over Calcutta since the 23rd. Some serious ones. Miss

Williams who is a jail visitor came to see us a few days ago armed with masses of roses, chrysanthemums and pansies. She is so human and so full of humour.

Chinta Malaviya was released yesterday on the expiry of her two months.

The old year ends today.

This time last year I was in Cocanada with Lekha and Tara and Rita was spending her holidays in Bombay with Ranjit.

The year before I was in this same barrack and ushered in the new year sitting at my grating looking out into the night. How quickly the years pass and what tragic memories they are leaving behind.

What does 1943 hold for us I wonder. More sorrow and suffering, or a glimpse of the promised land? Whatever it is I pray we may face the future with courage and dignity. My thoughts turn more than ever to the little ones alone in Anand Bhawan. But I am confident they will conduct themselves worthily and that thought helps.

NEW YEAR'S DAY : 1943

*"Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth
nor blessed abode
But the hope of the City of God at the other
end of the road.
Not for us are content and quiet, and peace
of mind
For we go seeking a City that we shall never
find
There is no solace on earth for us—for such
as we—
Who search for a hidden city which we shall
never see.
Only the road and the dawn, the sun the wind
and the rain
And the watchfire under the stars and sleep
and the road again."*

We were informed today that "the Government of India have permitted the members of the Congress Working Committee to correspond with members of their families on personal and domestic matters only, any such letters addressed to Mrs. Pandit and Mrs. Indira Gandhi will be delivered and they will be permitted to reply subject to the same restriction about subject matter."

I cannot understand how any two people who have been in different prisons for six months without any contact with their homes or each other and without the news of their families can write to each other on domestic matters. But ours is not to question why.

Occasionally we feed the convict babies. They look forward to it and wash and clean up before coming to us.

I have had a small *choldari* (tent) put up in front of the barrack which I use as a kitchen. The kids come and watch me cook and help to wash the vegetables, clean the rice and so forth. It is good to see their enjoyment of the food. They are exceedingly polite and never leave without saying, *Namaste. Jai - Hind*

I wish there was some better arrangement for the welfare of these unfortunate kids. They never have a chance to turn out good.

Our flowers are looking up. The morning glory is climbing well and there are several deep blue and mauve flowers. We have some pansies and nasturtiums also and a row of cosmos which stand against the wall and look quite pretty. The larkspurs and several other flowers have not done at all well in spite of care from Indu and Lekha. Sometime ago we persuaded the matron to

plant a few vegetables and the tomatoes, chillies and *dhania* are all coming up. Yesterday we picked nearly a dozen really good tomatoes.

Lekha and I do quite a bit of reading together. We are enjoying Plato these days—Lekha lives in the Republic. We also read a good deal of Hindi and some Sanskrit. This is the first time in many years that Lekha and I have been able to do things together. It is strange that we should have to come to jail in order to be near each other. But the world is full of stranger things !

I have been reading Sinclair's "Dragon's Teeth" It reminds me of so many stories I heard during my visit to Europe in 1938. Quite a number of our friends were at that time, facing situations very similar to those described in the book. The world today seems to have shrunk and consists of only two groups—those who suffer for an ideal and those who inflict the suffering. It is tragic that in this age of civilization—so called the human race should be incapable of adjusting its differences without inflicting sorrow and suffering on each other in such great measure. All these things strike one so much more forcibly in prison where feel-

ings are apt to get tense and where one labours under a sense of helplessness. These constant pilgrimages to prison are, as a rule, deadening, and one cannot undergo the experience again and again without bearing the scars on one's soul. It is only the favoured few whom prison cannot break because their vision and their passion for freedom enables them to soar beyond the locks and bars of jail and no physical restrictions can take away their liberty.

Sitting here I find it very difficult to understand or excuse that group of people which live between two worlds—the world of conflict for the sake of ideals and that other world which seeks to crush truth and light and beauty and lowers human dignity and makes a mockery of civilization. Such people seem to grow in numbers. Neither the tragedy of their own country nor the terrible world conflict seems to affect them.

*"Mourn not the dead who in the cool earth
lie, dust into dust*

*The cool sweet earth who mothers those who
die, as all men must.*

*Mourn not your captive comrades who must
dwell, too strong to strive*

*Each in his steel bound coffin of a cell, buried
alive*

*But rather mourn that apathetic throng, the
cowed and weak*

*Who see the world's great sorrow and it's
wrong, and dare not speak."*

A disturbing rumour has reached us that Bapu is going to fast. If only some authentic news were available!

9th February 1943

Today Lekha and I had our fortnightly interview with Ranjit. Heard in the office that Bapu is to begin his fast tomorrow. Ranjit told us that the men are all going to observe a twenty-four-hour fast in sympathy. They are sending a letter to the Superintendent informing him of their decision and asking that no rations may be sent to them. Naturally everybody is distressed.

On my return from the interview we discussed the position and decided to follow the example of the men and have a twenty-four-hour fast. I have drafted a letter to the Superintendent on the lines of the one sent by our men and we have all signed it.

14th February 1943

It is the fifth day of Bapu's fast.

In spite of the severe watch we manage

to get news of his condition. The first day we had the fast as planned. In the evening before lock up we joined together in prayer for a few minutes. For each one of us this is a period of very great strain and suspense.

21st March 1943

Just heard that I may go home on parole for a few days. Shall leave this morning. I hate leaving Indu and Lekha but it can't be helped. They will have to cook for themselves when I go and will benefit by the experience.

20th April 1943

I have returned to jail after a thirty day interlude.

Lekha was released during my parole period and I discussed with her the question of joining Wellesley College. She was reluctant to leave India and argued against it. But as Ranjit and I always wanted the girls to have the advantage of the wider vision that education in a free country gives, I pressed my point and told her she would be in a far better position to serve India in a few years with the benefits that an American College and contacts with worthwhile people who are doing things, than in her present condition. It is hard to curb the impatience of

eighteen but finally she consented.

Later, I decided that Tara should also go. Ranjit gave his whole-hearted support and I cabled friends in the United States to arrange admission.

The reply from the President of Wellesley College came in 48 hours: "Wellesley College proud and pleased to welcome your daughters."

It was a big relief—I have had to go into a great deal of correspondence regarding passports, visas and the necessary sanction for dollar exchange and there was hardly any time to look into matters connected with the house, servants etc.

I saw the girls off to Bombay yesterday and drove to Naini straight from the station.

The parting was a difficult affair and though we were all very near to tears we would not give in and kept talking of other things. As the train steamed out, the children waved to me and said, "We shall keep the flag flying darling, wherever we are. Don't worry—give papa our love when you see him."

I know we have done right in sending them to the United States. They will have wider opportunities of development and will

be well cared for and yet.....and yet..... America is so terribly far away.

We are now permitted newspapers at our own expense.

27th April 1943

I am told the men detainees of the first class will be sent to Bareilly in a few days. I hope Ranjit will not be transferred to Bareilly jail. In 1932 this place broke his health completely. It is a notorious place and in his present condition it will immediately affect Ranjit. As the summer comes he grows weaker and has been having trouble with his breathing again—I can't bear him to be in prison. He is so much a child of the wide open spaces.

3rd May 1943

This morning the Superintendent threw a bomb shell in the shape of an announcement that Ranjit is to be transferred with other first division prisoners to Bareilly Central Jail tonight. What could I say? Up to now both Ranjit and I were under the impression that he would be allowed to stay on here until arrangements for the girls' departure were complete.

I hate the idea of Bareilly. I am sure Rajit will be miserable there. He is such a

very sensitive person and his surroundings affect him. He is not meant to be in the rough and tumble that is Indian politics. With his wealth of learning and fastidious scholarship, his love of art and of all those finer aspects of life which are understood by so few people, this association day after day with crudeness and ignorance is a process which is breaking him down physically. It is a slow daily sacrifice which can be so much more deadly than some big heroic gesture made in a moment of emotional upheaval. But this is not how our jailors argue. I can only hope for the best and trust that Ranjit's tremendous will-power will help to keep his mind and body fit, and the change will not harm him too much. His departure from here will leave a gap in my restricted life. It was so comforting to know that he was on the other side of the wall. I am sometimes amazed at this side of the wall.

I am sometimes amazed at this sense of oneness I have with Ranjit and yet how many years we have spent apart.

6th May 1943

My request for a change of rations as prescribed by the Civil Surgeon, Lucknow,

up. There are more frequent searches. The pencils we get from the office must be signed for, notebooks numbered and initialed. When I ask why all this is being done' the reply is that letters are being smuggled out of prison. What is required, of course, is not more frequent searches but a better class of wardresses, more educated and better paid. The easiest thing in prison is to send out a letter. I do not write from personal experience, because my wretched superiority-complex never lets me to do what others are doing so I am sometimes saved in spite of myself!

Ranjit was transferred with others including Tandonji.

We heard that there was some trouble in the office owing to Tandonji's luggage. He brought to Naini a crude machine with which he extracts his sugarcane juice everyday. As his diet is very simple and consists mainly of various juices and any odds and ends of fruit which can be obtained, it was necessary that he should be allowed to carry the machine. After some unpleasantness he was permitted to take it.

The very thought of the Bareilly Central Prison makes me feel upset. It is badly

located and is known as one of the worst prisons in this province. When Ranjit was there in 1933 he fell very ill owing to the place being constantly filled up with smoke from a neighbouring factory. It took months of careful nursing after his release to build up his health. The other detenues transferred are also not in very fit condition and Bareilly will not help them.

12th May 1943

No news from Ranjit. Of course, we are not allowed to correspond, but I thought may be some word would come through.

I had a letter from Bhai today. It took twenty days to arrive. He says the more he thinks about the idea of the girls going to America, the more he feels it is the right thing. He says he can't imagine why the idea didn't strike him !

13th May 1943

Indu and I are being released this morning. I wonder if any order is to be served on us. If so we shall be back here before long.

27th May 1943

Here I am back again in Naini after an eventful week ! It was like coming back home and the drabness and dirt and noise

were all part of some familiar and well understood life. It was a pleasant surprise to find that I was capable of an immediate adjustment and that my mind was at peace. The pieces of the puzzle fell into place at once, making a complete picture. Even the news that conditions in Bareilly are very bad did not upset me as it ordinarily would have done. I know that Ranjit has the strength of mind to pull through mere physical difficulties and restraints. I only hope his health is not too badly affected.

As we refused to comply with the externment order served on us, a police officer came to the house yesterday to enquire when I would be ready to return to jail. I said anytime suited me and he suggested 6 p.m. which I accepted. There was no warrant fortunately for Indu who is in no condition to return to Naini at present as she is down with fever and a very bad cold.

At 6.15 p. m. the City Kotwal—a person whose renown had preceded him—arrived with a warrant under sec. 129 D. I. R. My luggage was sent in a police lorry and I was taken in the Kotwal's car—he driving and a deputy of the Intelligence Department by his side. *En route* he made various comments

regarding me and my family, but not meeting with any response he was obliged to concentrate his attention on driving his car which was an ancient vehicle in the last stages of collapse. He is a good representative of British rule in India.

The girls have sailed on the 15th. All this time I had been planning and arranging for them to get away and now when they have left I feel unhappy. The days will be heavy with anxiety until I hear of their safe arrival.

I remember laughing at mother because she was always so anxious when Bhai was on a voyage. And now I behave in exactly the same fashion, even though I have more cause for anxiety than she had, in those far distant peaceful days in the early part of the century.

I was met at the jail gate by beaming faces, and the welcome from the convicts was perfectly sincere.

Purnima and I sat and talked until 9 p. m. then we had some food and retired to our respective beds, she to read and I to gaze up at the stars.

4th June 1943

Have just seen in the
from Melbourne to the e.

Tara have arrived in Australia on their way to the United States. My heart has been so heavy the last few days and in my mind I have been following the girls on their journey.

News from Bareilly is bad. As there is no letter from Ranjit it means only one of two things—either my letter of the 24th has not reached him, or, owing to conditions inside, he is not permitted to write to me.

7th June 1943

I received a packet of what looks like Chrysanthemum tea from an unknown Chinese friend. I shall not be able to enjoy it without Ranjit and Bhai. One cannot just drink an exquisite beverage by oneself.

I saw in today's paper a message to the effect that the girls have passed Melbourne..

The news from Bengal is bad. The effects of the Midnapore cyclone are not yet over and now a food-crisis seems to be developing. The *Modern Review* predicts a hard time. What a mess everything is in, and those who might be unravelling the tangled skein are behind bars....

The news of the treatment of political prisoners all over the province is very bad. A deliberate policy of harsh treatment and every

sort of humiliation. It makes one forget the Congress creed. ...

11th June 1943

I have been unable to leave my bed for many days and the doctors have been dosing me to no effect.

I am informed that I shall be released on grounds of health.

